

HARD-TOP CONVERTIBLE ROOF APPARATUS

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates generally to roof systems in automotive vehicles and more particularly to a hard-top convertible roof apparatus.

[0002] Rigid hard-top convertible roofs have been used on a variety of automotive vehicles. Some of these conventional convertible hard-top roofs are stored in a generally vertical orientation and some are stored in a predominantly horizontal orientation. Furthermore, some of these conventional hard-top roofs fold in a clamshelling manner while others are collapsible in an overlapping manner. Examples of traditional hard-top convertible roofs are disclosed in the following patents: U.S. Patent No. 6,347,828 entitled "Actuation Mechanism for a Two Piece Retractable Hard-Top Roof for an Automobile" which issued to Rapin et al. on February 19, 2002; U.S. Patent No. 6,318,793 entitled "Two Piece Retractable Hard-Top Roof for an Automobile" which issued to Rapin et al. on November 20, 2001; U.S. Patent No. 5,979,970 entitled "Roof Assembly for a Convertible Vehicle" which issued to Rothe et al. on November 9, 1999; U.S. Patent No. 5,785,375 entitled "Retractable Hard-Top for an Automotive Vehicle" which issued to Alexander et al. on July 28, 1998; U.S. Patent No. 5,769,483 entitled "Convertible Motor Vehicle Roof" which issued to Danzl et al. on June 23, 1998; U.S. Patent No. 5,743,587 entitled "Apparatus for Use in an Automotive

Vehicle having a Convertible Roof System” which issued to Alexander et al. on April 28, 1998; and EPO Patent Publication No. 1 092 580 A1 which was published on April 18, 2001. The U.S. patents are incorporated by reference herein.

[0003] Most automotive vehicle weatherstrips include hollow bulbs disposed on a generally U-shaped carrier. The carrier is typically pushed onto a double thickness pinch weld flange of the mating vehicle panels. Various weatherstrips are also known for removable roofs including that disclosed in exemplary U.S. Patent No. 5,950,366 entitled “Seal Structure for Removable Roof” which issued to Uhlmeier on September 14, 1999.

[0004] Furthermore, many traditional headliners are used to aesthetically cover the interior surface of convertible and stationary roofs. Typical convertible roof headliners are made from a sheet of stretched fabric or vinyl, fabric or vinyl covered resinated foam, or fabric or vinyl covered resinated fiberglass. Such foam-based headliner materials are disclosed within the following U.S. Patent Nos.: 5,095,592 entitled “Fastener Device for Composite Materials” which issued to Doerfling on March 17, 1992; 4,698,252 entitled “Composite Foam Articles and Method for Fabricating Such Articles” which issued to Koch et al. on October 6, 1987; and 4,350,734 entitled “Integral Composite Foam Product and Method” which issued to Hammond on September 21, 1982; all of which are incorporated by reference herein. Many conventional convertible headliners are attached to the supporting structure, such as roof inner

panels or roof bows, by polymeric Christmas-tree fasteners, hook-and-loop type fasteners, or polymeric interior trim garnish moldings.

[0005] In accordance with the present invention, a hard-top convertible roof apparatus is provided. Another aspect of the present invention employs rigid, hard-top front and/or rear roof sections. A further aspect of the present invention provides that the outside surfaces of retractable roof sections have a generally vertical orientation when in their open and retracted positions. In yet another aspect of the present invention, a roof structure has diverging peripheral flanges. A first roof flange retains a roof-to-roof weatherstrip and an adjacent second roof flange retains an interior trim panel, in still another aspect of the present invention. Another aspect of the present invention uses a weatherstrip for a convertible hard-top roof which has a pair of spaced apart, yet connected, bulbs, with the entire weatherstrip being interior of the outer roof surface when the roof is fully raised. In a further aspect of the present invention, a method of assembling a hard-top convertible roof apparatus is also provided.

[0006] The apparatus of the present invention is advantageous over conventional systems in that the present invention is expected to provide superior water sealing. The present invention is also advantageous by simplifying assembly of components to a roof system. Furthermore, the present invention weatherstrip does not present an unsightly appearance from outside the vehicle since it is not exposed thereby also reducing undesirable aerodynamic noise. The interior trim fastening arrangement of the present

invention is advantageous over prior devices by employing hidden yet inexpensive fasteners. Additional advantages and features of the present invention will become apparent from the following description and appended claims, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] Figure 1 is a fragmentary, perspective view, as observed from the rear left corner of the vehicle, showing the preferred embodiment of a hard-top convertible roof apparatus of the present invention, disposed in a fully closed and raised position;

[0008] Figure 2 is a fragmentary and perspective view, like that of Figure 1, showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in a partially retracted position;

[0009] Figure 3 is a fragmentary and perspective view, like that of Figure 1, showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in a fully open and retracted position;

[0010] Figure 4 is a centerline cross sectional view, taken along line 4-4 of Figure 3, showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in the fully retracted position;

[0011] Figure 5 is a side diagrammatic view showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in the fully raised position;

[0012] Figure 6 is a side diagrammatic view showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in the partially retracted position;

[0013] Figure 7 is a side diagrammatic view showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in the fully retracted position;

[0014] Figure 8 is an exploded perspective view showing the preferred embodiment apparatus; and

[0015] Figure 9 is a fragmentary, centerline cross sectional view, like that of Figure 4, showing the preferred embodiment apparatus, disposed in the fully raised position.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0016] Referring to Figures 1-7, a convertible roof system 21 is part of an automotive vehicle and includes a hard-top front roof section 23, a hard-top rear roof section 25, a top stack mechanism 27 operable to move the roof sections, a rigid tonneau cover 29 and a tonneau cover mechanism 31. Roof sections 23 and 25 are automatically movable from fully raised and closed positions covering a passenger compartment 33, as shown in Figures 1 and 5, to fully retracted and open positions, as shown in Figures 3, 4 and 7, wherein roof sections 23 and 25 are stowed in a roof storage area or compartment 35. Roof storage compartment 35 is located between and physically separated by metal panels 36 (see Figure 7) from passenger compartment 33 and an externally accessible storage area for miscellaneous articles such as a trunk or pickup truck

bed 37. A rigid, glass back window or backlite 39 is secured to rear roof section 25 while front roof section 23 is disengagably attached to a front header panel 41 by latches. Roof sections 23 and 25 are preferably stamped from steel sheets and include inner reinforcement panels, but the roof panels may alternately be formed from polymeric composites or aluminum. Roof sections 23 and 25 have opaque outside surfaces 43 that are typically painted. These outside surfaces 43 define three-dimensionally curved planes which are stored in a predominantly vertical and parallel nested orientation when fully retracted and stowed; this can be observed best in Figures 4 and 7.

[0017] Top stack mechanism 27 is in mirrored symmetry in both outboard sides of the vehicle. Top stack mechanism 27 includes a pair of linkage assemblies 51 and a pair of hydraulic actuators 55. Linkage assemblies 51 are preferably constructed in accordance with German patent application serial number 101 39 354.7 entitled "Carbiolet-Fahrzeug" (Vehicle) which was filed on August 17, 2001, which is incorporated by reference herein. Roof sections 23 and 25 can be tightly and closely nested together when fully retracted and the centerline, fore-and-aft roof storage area opening can be minimized due to linkage assemblies 51.

[0018] Figures 8 and 9 illustrate a peripheral roof structure 201 at the peripheral mating of an outer front roof panel 203 and an inner front roof panel 205. Front roof panels 203 and 205 contact each other for MIG welding at joining area 207, however, peripheral flanges 209 and 211 of the outer and inner panels,

respectively, then have a diverged orientation relative to each other, which terminates in their outboard or distal edges.

[0019] A rubber or polymeric elastomer weatherstrip 251 has a U-shaped carrier 253, a hollow and flexible first bulb 255 projecting from a corner of carrier 253, a flexible and bridging water trough section 257 with a reduced thickness living hinge 258, and a hollow and flexible second bulb 259 disposed on a distal edge of water trough 257. A U-shaped metal insert 261 is encapsulated only within carrier 253 and no other metal structure is located within the weatherstrip in this preferred embodiment. Instead, the water trough section relies on the adjacent shape of peripheral roof structure 201 for support when carrier 253 is pushed onto the single thickness of peripheral flange 209 of the outer front roof panel.

[0020] A front interior trim panel, preferably a cloth covered and resinated foam headliner 301, is secured to peripheral flange 211 of inner front roof panel 205 by a polymeric clip 303, having an h cross-section shape. An opening between a pair of bifurcated legs 305 receives peripheral flange 211 while a body 307 is secured to a hidden, back side of headliner 301 by staples or an adhesive. Polymeric Christmas-tree fasteners 309 attach the front of front and rear headliners 301 and 351 to their respective front and rear roof inner panels 205 and 353 in a hidden manner when the convertible roof is fully raised as shown in Figure 9. A metal, rear outer roof panel 355 is welded to rear inner roof panel 353.

[0021] While various embodiments of the hard-top convertible roof apparatus have been disclosed, it should be appreciated that variations may be made to the present invention. For example, the presently disclosed weatherstrip can be used in other areas of the vehicle. Furthermore, the present roof structure, weatherstrip and/or headliner attachment may be used at a front header-to-one bow interface or at a five bow-to-tonneau cover/decklid/tulip panel interface (for soft or hard-tops). Also, the hard-top roofs can be covered with vinyl, fabric or painted, or can include transparent glass panels. Moreover, a second weatherstrip can replace the headliner clip. It should also be appreciated that three or more hard-top sections can be employed with the present apparatus between each. The presently disclosed headliner component may further be replaced by rigid, polymeric garnish molding components or lamp components. While various materials and shapes have been disclosed, it should be appreciated that various other shapes and materials can be employed. It is intended by the following claims to cover these and any other departures from the disclosed embodiments which fall within the true spirit of this invention.